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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/RSP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD -
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

A) "A-bian's Pledge"

Washington correspondent Vincent Chang said in the conservative, pro-unification "United Daily News" (12/2):

". President Chen immediately reiterated his `four No's' pledge in response to the State Department's concerns. The Chen Shui-bian administration has obviously discovered that unlike the past four years, the Bush administration in its second term will no longer tolerate Chen's willful remarks or behaviors that cause him to constantly step on the red line and trespass the bottom line set by Washington.

"Yes, the bottom line has emerged. Washington has put all the pledges that Chen has made over the past four years together and woven them into a big net. Washington will cast the net over Chen, lock him up and push him back every time when it feels that Chen has crossed the boundary of `Chen's pledge' as interpreted by the Americans. It looks like the United States will not act carelessly or hesitate to inflict punishment against Chen's move this time. .

"Having served as president for four years, Chen has grown accustomed to using the game of words to test Washington's bottom line, and he seems to quite enjoy doing so. The Taiwan people have long become used to Chen's being a chameleon all the time and throwing out one promise after another. What's quite unexpected is that the Americans take Chen's pledge seriously and ask him to stick to it. Now the ever-changing A-bian has forced the Bush administration to show all its cards regarding the Taiwan policy. As a result, Chen has also exhausted all the flexibility and space that Taiwan used to enjoy and left no room for vagueness.

"This is something probably Chen has never expected."

B) "Military Mutual Trust and Political Mutual Trust"

Journalist Wu Ming-chieh noted in the centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" (12/2):

"Since the end of last year, misunderstanding caused by lack of mutual trust between the United States and Taiwan has, several times, brought bilateral relations to an impasse. But on the other hand, the mutual trust with regard to military between the two sides has been enhanced rather than been reduced. Judged from this perspective, [it is evident that] Washington's current policy toward Taiwan is to separate politics with military. Nonetheless, strengthening military mutual trust between Washington and Taipei is still in the United States' interests for the time being, but building political mutual trust has become a burden for the United States. It remains to be seen whether these two kinds of mutual trust will affect each other in the future. .

"Over the past year, Taiwan and the United States have maintained stable military exchanges even when both sides did not have sufficient political mutual trust. Obviously there is a certain force inside the United States that supports Taiwan security. The foundation of such a force comes from the thinking that to maintain Taiwan's security is to maintain the United States' national interests. Even though Taiwan can make use of this force in exchange for military bargaining chips to advance its self defense, it might end up in gaining nothing either politically or militarily if it hopes to use this bargaining chip to alter Washington's thinking about the Taiwan policy - namely, to renounce `one China' policy or to accept Taiwan independence. ."

C) "An Independent Sovereign State Should Have the Autonomy to Either Institute or Amend Its Constitution"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" commented in an

editorial (12/1):

"[State Department Spokesman] Richard Boucher said 'our primary interest is in maintaining stability across the Taiwan Strait, and the United States is opposed to any unilateral steps that would change the status quo.' 'We are opposed to any referendum that would change Taiwan's status or move towards independence.' Boucher's remarks showed that Washington is concerned about Taiwan's push for constitutional reform because it misunderstands Taiwan's plan for a new constitution and thinks it is a referendum that will move toward independence. Also, Washington's misjudgment of the cross-Strait situation makes it believe that Taiwan wants to change the status quo, a move that might lead to escalated tension across the Taiwan Strait. But in reality, Washington's doubts about President Chen's timetable for the new constitution is totally unnecessary. First, we have emphasized repeatedly that following several decades' of democratization and localization, ... Taiwan is already an independent sovereign state. It does not need to seek to confirm its independent status by a referendum or a new constitution. . The plan to give birth to a new constitution is actually a movement to make Taiwan a normal country. The making of a timely, relevant and viable constitution will make Taiwan a country worthy of its name.

"The goal for Taiwan's plan to institute a new constitution is to 'de-Sanitize,' to get rid of everything that was made by the KMT, and to be a normalized country. This is an internal restructuring of Taiwan's constitutional system and also a manifestation of Taiwan people's consciousness of their sovereignty. The move will not jeopardize any other countries' interests and is unrelated to the international situation. Thus, why do people outside Taiwan worry that it will unilaterally change the status quo and trigger tension across the Taiwan Strait?"

D) "US Need Not Rein in Chen"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" editorialized (12/2):

"US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said recently he thinks President Chen Shui-bian should clarify whether his latest statements about a referendum and a new constitution violate his 'four no's' pledge. .

"As the US is unable to distinguish between the political parties here, it is only natural for them to try to put down the brakes on referendum talk, and try to cool things down in order to avoid further tension in cross-strait relations.

"So has Chen overstepped his boundaries? Judging from his inauguration speeches in 2000 and this year, as well as the '10 points' he made during a speech last month, he seems to be standing firmly on his promise not to declare independence, change the national flag or title, or hold a referendum on unification or independence. But he has also promised the people of Taiwan a suitable new constitution during his term - and that it will be decided via a referendum. At a quick glance, these two promises seem to be contradictory, but a more thorough look reveals his advocacy of amending the Constitution as being on the safe side of the US' 'bottom line.'

"First, the Constitution in its current form was created in China, in 1947. It is a Constitution aimed at ruling the vast territories and population of China, Tibet and Mongolia, and as such it is of course unsuitable to the territory and people currently under its jurisdiction. .

"Second, in his May 20 inauguration speech, Chen stated specifically that since there was no domestic consensus over what to do about the national flag, national title and the territories mapped out by the Constitution, these would not be subject to amendment. As the symbols of the nation are not to be included in the discussions over constitutional amendments - and any amendment will be confined to restructuring the administrative and political system - then clearly Chen has not gone beyond the parameters set by the US. .

"The DPP advocates a constitutional amendment that will retain the country's national emblems, while the Taiwan Solidarity Union advocates the creation of a new constitution for the nation of Taiwan. Because of this divergence over amendments and the creation of a new

constitution, Chen and former president Lee Teng-hui have aired their differences publicly. Washington should not confuse the proposals of the DPP and the TSU, even though they are both a part of the pan-green

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camp."

"Every country needs to make adjustments to its laws in response to a changing environment. Although Taiwan's international situation is unusual and its often finds itself under international scrutiny, it retains the right to build a political system adapted to its needs, so long as this action does not negatively impact its security and that of the international community."

E) "Warning from the U.S."

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" editorialized (12/2):

". Although neither he [i.e. President Chen Shui-bian] nor the others in his administration explicitly mentioned it, the plan [to put a new constitution for Taiwan to a referendum in 2006] would amount to the declaration of Taiwan independence. If implemented, it would be the realization of a long cherished goal of his.

"The goal has proved unrealistic after all. He had no sooner announced his plan than the U.S. State Department issued a warning that made him back away. .

"Only the most nave will believe those denials. The experts in the U.S. State Department certainly won't be fooled. Washington have [sic] obviously seen through Chen. In late October, Secretary of State Colin Powell, during a visit to Asia, said straightforwardly that 'Taiwan is not independent. .'

"The U.S. government's China policy used to be purposely fuzzy. Powell's statement represented a clear departure from that long-time stand. It is an indication that the U.S. government has grown tired of Chen's persistent pursuit of Taiwan independence, which has made the Taiwan Strait a trouble spot.

"The Chen administration will only suffer more humiliations if it continues to make aggressive efforts toward independence."

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